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The danger in anti-Cuba hysteria

By Linda Young

ON MONDAY, Oct. 26, The Tribune's front page headline screamed: "U.S. probes Cuba tie to Brinks gang." The most creditable sources for this claim were "unnamed FBI spokesmen."

The next day, the FBI reversed itself. No current relationship exists between the radicals and Cuban intelligence. This information appeared in Tuesday's Sun-Times, buried in a small piece on page 6.

This lack of balance has become a media standard. It reflects a new wave of hysteria emanating from Washington. The federal government—and much of the press, including The Tribune—have created a monster. On the flimsiest connections, they attempt to portray Cuba as an instigator of crime, sabotage, and general discontent in the U.S. These charges, combined with ominous new law enforcement measures, lay the basis for a guilt-by-association campaign that threatens the civil liberties to which we are all entitled.

This campaign targets "international terrorism," a label broad and vague enough to smear any number of groups. It has been used to describe politically-motivated saboteurs, various governments, and critics of the administration (who are labeled "unwitting dupes").

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One of the centers of "international terrorism," we are told, is Cuba. Considering the number of people who have established personal and professional ties with Cuba over the last few years, this new scare could easily become an out-and-out witch-hunt. Potential victims might include political supporters of Cuba (or supporters of causes backed by Cuba, such as opposition to South African apartheid), those who actively support normal, peaceful relations with Cuba, or even people who just subscribe to Cuban publications.

The danger to civil rights is more than talk. Measures are already being taken to prepare for government action against such "terrorists" and "dupes."

President Reagan's recently proposed executive order would grant the CIA its first authority to infiltrate and secretly try to influence the activity of domestic groups as it sees fit. A revived House Un-American Activities Committee may soon join the new Senate Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism in bringing back McCarthy-style investigations. U.S. citizens who wish to go abroad and make statements of which the State Department does not approve can now be stripped of their passports, thanks to a recent Supreme Court decision. The Freedom of Information Act, which made public the extent of governmental interference in social and political movements, will be revised to exempt the FBI and CIA, if the administration has its way.

All this, and more to come, in the name of "national security." Does the threat of

terrorism justify this? Or is it a concoction, like the "Reds under your bed" of the '50s, which may be used to stigmatize domestic social protest?

THIS MUCH IS clear: The razing of social services, and an ever more hostile military posture, are sure to be met by protest and resistance by the people who stand to lose from these developments. When this happens, an apparatus of social control and general mood of public fear will be in place, equipped to deal with disruptive elements and legal dissenters alike. All supporters of free speech have every reason to be wary of the charge of "terrorism."

The media seem to be contributing to the hysteria. A case in point is a Tribune Perspective article of Aug. 23 by Daniel James, who alleged that the Puerto Rican independence movement, Liberty City riots, and moves for normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations are all the result of "destabilization" schemes dreamed up by Castro and implemented by Cuban secret agents. All of these charges would have seemed ridiculous to most people a few years ago. But with every slanted headline, every unsubstantiated charge printed as news, a little bit more of the public's ability to sort facts from propaganda is whittled away.

At a time when guilt by association has become a justification for repression, and when the "Cuba connection" scare threatens to revive the witch hunts of the '50s, such irresponsible journalism is especially dangerous.